

Become A Special Educator In Tennessee

Feature Story

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I graduated from college with a degree in criminal justice with the goal of becoming a probation officer. I eventually achieved this goal. However, I was first employed as a case manager at a wilderness program for juvenile delinquent boys. This program had an on-site school, so I had the opportunity to be involved with their education. This is where my interest in special education was first sparked. During the next few years, I investigated the possibility of pursuing a different course of study. I always came to the same conclusion: I could not financially afford to enter a new undergraduate or graduate degree program.

Many years later, while employed as a probation officer and working on a Master's degree, I heard about the Become A Special Educator in Tennessee (BASE-TN) Program, a Tennessee Department of Education initiative that would pay for me to become licensed to teach special education in Tennessee. It was an opportunity that I could not bypass. I was a single mom at the time and knew there were many sacrifices that my two sons and I would have to make in order for me to return to school. However, I felt it would be worth it.

Just as I was completing my Master's degree in criminal justice, I was accepted into the BASE-TN Program, and I immediately began a series of changes and sacrifices in our lives. I sold my house, resigned from my job, and began substitute teaching on the days that I did not have class. It took three semesters of course work at MTSU and one semester of student teaching to complete the courses and other requirements to earn the special education teacher license. I am now in my 3rd year of teaching, serving as a behavior teacher in a Middle Tennessee high school. My family has experienced many positive changes during the last few years, and for some of those changes, I have BASE-TN to thank. I would encourage anyone who is interested in a career in special education to investigate the BASE-TN Program. It is never too late to make a change.